

My name is Hannah Harens and I am a competitive shotgun shooter. I am grateful for the opportunities I have to compete across CT, but it has become increasingly difficult to participate in the sport I love over the past few years, and this proposed bill would only make it harder; thus, I oppose H.B. 5653.

I have been involved in the shooting sports for over 10 years. One of my favorite things about this sport is that anyone can participate. Age and gender are not a factor, and the playing field is level for everyone, allowing pure skill to dictate success. I have enjoyed helping women become more involved in this historically male-dominated sport, allowing them to feel empowered as I have. Throughout the sport, firearm safety is the most important factor; every time a new shooter is introduced to the sport, the first thing they will learn is how to handle a firearm properly and safely. Even if the person decides the sport is not for them, they will have acquired the basic skills of gun safety and understand what firearms can do, skills that they can call upon if ever in a situation where it is necessary.

This sport has taken me to competitions across the country and I had the opportunity to train and compete throughout my undergraduate studies at MIT and now as I pursue a PhD at Northeastern University. I have met so many amazing people throughout my travels as a shooter, many of whom I consider my closest friends. I have participated in national and world shoots and have hopes of one day going to the Olympics.

Needless to say, this sport becomes quite expensive. I am lucky to have stayed in this sport since I started, but it is common to see the pattern so frequently occurring: as youth shooters (typically financially supported by their parents) enter adulthood and become financially independent, they tend to leave the sport, and eventually return a decade or two later once they finally have the means to afford to regularly train and compete. The financial burden placed on shooters has only increased in the past few years, as the supply chain shortages have nearly doubled the cost of ammunition, target costs have increased, and traveling is more expensive than ever. Instead of being a sport that everyone can compete in, many average-income people continue to be priced out of the sport, surrendering to the fact they may never compete again.

The introduction of H.B. 5653 would only add to the immense costs recreational and competitive shooters face to participate in the sport we love. Many members of the shooting community dedicate themselves to teaching the importance of firearm safety and provide support to the wider local community looking to learn more about firearms. Shooters should not also hold the burden of providing funding for community gun violence and intervention program grants, especially when we are the ones actively promoting the safe handling of firearms every day.

Please do not implement H.B. 5653, so that competitive shooters can continue to participate in the sport they train so hard for.